Water Environment Federation

Each year, wastewater treatment plants in the United States process more than 11.5 trillion gallons of sewage water, enough to fill Utah's Great Salt Lake more than twice. This sewage has the potential to cause catastrophic environmental damage, and it is up to the people who operate the 16,024 wastewater treatment plants in the United States to ensure that it does not harm the lakes, rivers, and seas that will eventually receive it.

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) helps professionals at wastewater treatment plants in this country and abroad exchange information and keep abreast of new technologies and regulations. In addition, the organization works to raise public awareness of water pollution and ways to fight it. A key resource for achieving these goals is the WEF's Internet site, located at **http://www.wef.org/**.

Water quality professionals who visit the WEF Web site can seek advice from colleagues on everyday workplace issues—from handling complaints about odors to reusing effluent—by participating in the technical discussion groups found on the site. Each of the 17 discussion groups allows visitors to read and post messages on a particular subject such as air quality and water reclamation.

Also available is information about the WEF's 47 technical committees. Each committee concentrates on a particular area of expertise, such as disinfection technologies or wastewater treatment in Latin America. Committee volunteers plan conferences and workshops and write and review articles for WEF publications. For example, the Collection Systems Committee is developing a series of public information brochures on sanitary sewer overflows.

The Government Affairs link on the home page leads to updates on pertinent legislation and the WEF's own legislative activities. The full text of the WEF publication *This Week in Washington* is available through the Publications link on the Government Affairs page. Information about other WEF publications is available by following the Periodicals link. Here visitors find subscription information and author guidelines for *Water Environment Research*, the WEF's peer-reviewed journal, and nine other WEF periodicals. Over 350 other publications, targeted toward everyone from researchers to students, can be ordered from the WEF through the Technical Resource Catalog link.

Free information and learning activities for students can be found by following the WEF for Students link on the navigation bar. Included here are coloring exercises for young elementary school children, meter-reading exercises for middle school students, and information about operating a wastewater treatment plant for high school students. Clicking the College/University link brings up information on applying for scholarships and joining student chapters of the WEF.

The Public Information link takes visitors to resources that include a glossary of water environment terms and fact sheets on various water quality issues, such as how to dispose of household hazardous waste. Another link here takes visitors to a calendar of WEF events. The WEF holds a large annual conference that attracts thousands of people each year. Information on the annual conference is available through the WEFTEC (WEF Technical Exchange Conference) Conference & Exposition link. Links on the WEFTEC page take visitors to information on other WEFTEC activities. Further down the WEFTEC page is a link to information on WEFTeach, a workshop for high school teachers that coincides with the conference. WEFTEC 2000 will be held 14–18 October 2000 in Anaheim, California. **–Christopher G. Reuther**

Assault on Arsenic Poisoning

On 2 October 1999, the Bangladeshi government announced it is implementing a three-step plan to stop widespread arsenic poisoning in its nation, where groundwater contaminated by naturally occurring arsenic is found in over 90% of the districts and 20 million people are at risk for poisoning.

The government's plan, already launched in six districts, calls for nationwide testing of tubewells for contamination, identifying arsenicosis sufferers and referring them to health centers, and educating the community through television and radio commercials, manuals, brochures, posters, and music and dance performances in villages.

Over 34 support agencies, including the World Bank and UNICEF, have joined the government on this project. Field schools have been set up to train agency workers, and a database has been developed to supply information about arsenic screening results.

Seven-a-Day Could Keep TB Away

Doctors affiliated with Partners In Health, a Cambridge, Massachusetts–based nonprofit health organization, have developed an effective weapon against multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (TB). Doctors Paul Farmer and Jim Yong Kim conducted their research in a low-income area of Lima, Peru, and found that a two-year daily regimen of seven drugs has an 85% effectiveness rate and costs less than conventional treatments.

This breakthrough is important as TB kills over two million people a year worldwide and its multidrug-resistant form continues to spread, especially in Russia, China, India, and Latin America, according to a 9 November 1999 *Washington Post* article.

Following an international meeting of TB experts in New York City, plans were adopted to begin pilot treatment programs in Russia, Latvia, and Kazakhstan.

Polluting Pets

A study on urban bacterial water pollution published in the December 1999 issue of the *Journal of Environmental Engineering* concurs with previous research that found pet waste is the probable source of such contamination. Using methods to test water for fecal streptococci, bacteria unique to animal feces, researchers at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, found high numbers of the bacteria in runoff from lawns and roadways.

The study found a high correlation between housing density and the level of contamination. Coauthor Edward L. Thackston says, "One of the things associated with housing density is the number of pets per acre." Another factor is the urban environment—animal fecal matter washes off paved roads and sidewalks into storm drains or into nearby open waterways.